

Mr. Owl by flippyspoon

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Summary:

How many licks does it take to get to the Tootsie Roll center of a Tootsie Pop?

Mr. Owl

It was May and so close to graduation that Steve had the sensation of being gradually launched into space. He wasn't sure if that was a good thing or not. There was a lot to think about. He'd never heard the word "future" so much as in May of 1985. Teachers were constantly talking about it, parents were giving dry lectures about it at the dinner table. The word had lost all meaning. But at least concerns about his "future" had allowed Steve to ignore certain people who drew his attention, or rather one singular person.

Something had happened to Billy since the Byers House Showdown (as Steve thought of it). Steve had theorized it was some weird effect of the drugs Max injected him with except that Will was just the same and anyway Billy had changed gradually from being an asshole to being, well, just kind of a dick but in a way that was sorta charming. Not that Steve had told anyone he thought so. Or told anyone about the number of times he'd imagined Billy sucking his dick. Soon Billy Hargrove would be gone. Or more likely he'd be whipping up Blizzards at the Dairy Queen. But at least Steve wouldn't have to see him every day if he didn't *want* to.

Not that he *would* want to.

On a Friday in detention he was thinking about his "future" once again when in walked the person who he would not have guessed would ever become his future.

Steve thought it was stupid to give seniors detention this close to graduation. They weren't going to learn any lessons they hadn't already learned. And anyway his detention was just for tardies. It wasn't as if management at his dad's company was going to give him detentions for tardies.

Billy Hargrove approached the seat right next to Steve in the back as if they weren't the only two people in the classroom other than Mrs. Schneider who was half-asleep in the front.

Which Steve thought was weird.

It wasn't as if they were friends.

They weren't exactly unfriendly anymore either.

Billy pulled his chair out so that it scraped on the floor and sat down with plop and a heavy sigh. He tossed Harrington a nod and whipped out a Tootsie Roll Pop.

The part of Steve that had been trying to cut down on the dick sucking fantasies groaned.

This was a new habit of Hargrove's.

Steve had heard him say something about trying to save money on cigarettes and also, it wasn't as if he could smoke in class, but sometimes he was really craving something to stick in his mouth, apparently.

Steve had thought about this when Nancy brought up the term "oral fixation" at lunch one day. Steve didn't know what the hell they'd been talking about because Billy was one table over sucking on a red Tootsie Pop (*always* the red ones). Jonathan had laughed. Of course, Jonathan already knew what an oral fixation was. The two of them had their own secret language by now. They acted like they were already in college anyway, as if everybody wasn't gradually being launched into space. Steve was over it now, but the third wheel deal was kind of annoying.

Billy unwrapped his Tootsie Pop and started licking at it.

Of course, the son of a bitch actually licked it. Nobody actually licked Tootsie Pops. You stuck it in your mouth, but Billy had that tongue thing. He was constantly doing shit with his tongue. Steve had noticed this from Billy's first day at Hawkins High. He was always wagging his tongue at Steve or sticking it between his teeth.

Oral fixation , Steve thought.

It meant you craved oral stimulation.

Like dick sucking, for example.

Nope , Steve thought, as Billy attacked his Tootsie Pop. *Not thinking about that* . But he was glad his lap was covered by the table.

Billy didn't always lick it, of course. Now he was wrapping his wet red lips around it as he gazed down at a beat-up spiral notebook where he doodled some kind of monster that looked way too much like a demogorgon.

“Need something, Harrington?” Billy said.

“What? No.”

He realized he'd been blatantly staring.

Billy had no response to that. Steve crossed his arms on the desk and dragged his eyes away from Billy and his Tootsie Pop but there was really nothing to look at and he had nothing to do.

“Do you have another Tootsie Pop?” Steve said.

Billy took the sucker from between his lips with a loud smack and held it out towards Steve. “You want this one?”

Steve blinked at him. “Uh...no.”

“Alright,” Billy said with a shrug, and turned back to his notebook.

Steve huffed and scratched the table with his thumbnail.

“You ever suck dick?” Billy said.

“ *What* ?”

“Did. You. Ever. Suck. A. Dick.”

Steve heaved a long-suffering sigh and said tiredly, “No. Fuck off.”

“Just asking.”

“Great.”

“I have.”

Steve's head swiveled around like a ventriloquist dummy's and then his brain caught up with the conversation. "Sure. Okay."

"Okay." Billy shrugged. "I mean I have."

"Yeah? Good for you. Congratulations."

"Thanks." Billy gave him a little smile.

Steve snorted and continued to deface the table with his thumbnail.

"It's not like it's a big deal," Billy said.

"I...didn't say it was?"

"You're so uptight, Harrington."

"I'm actually just sitting here," Steve said. His leg was jiggling under the table. He kept bumping Billy's knee.

"I know this is Nowheresville, Indiana," Billy went on. "But guys do suck dicks sometimes."

"Okay..."

Billy had a pair of aviators clipped to his collar and he put them on and grinned at Steve. "It's the eighties, right? Frankie say relax, babe."

Steve blurted a laugh at that and Billy joined him and nudged him with elbow.

"Do you have another Tootsie Pop?"

Billy reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a red Tootsie Pop and just as Steve started to reach for it, he held it away. Because of course he did.

"One question," Billy said.

Steve rolled his eyes. "What?"

"You ever *thought* about sucking dick?"

“No! Jesus.”

Billy squinted at him and slowly proffered the sucker. “Alright.”

Steve took the Tootsie Pop and unwrapped it and gave it a good suck. Billy watched him.

“Don’t knock it till you’ve tried it. Sucking dick, I mean.”

“Will you *stop* ?” Steve said. “Why are you messing with me today?”

Billy shook his head sadly. “You’re slower on the uptake than you are on the court, ya know that, Harrington?”

Steve stuck the Pop in his mouth and gave him the finger. They sat in silence, the only sounds the smacking of their mouths and the tick of the clock and every inch of Steve’s skin felt hot and hotter still when each time he glanced over at Billy, Billy was already looking at him.

“What’re you gonna do after graduation?” Steve muttered.

“Oh come *on* .”

“What!”

Billy glared at him. “If you wanna talk to me, just talk to me, man. Don’t be such a...” He gestured with his Tootsie Pop. “A boring square about it.”

“I’m *not* trying to talk to you.”

“You just said-”

“Whatever. Forget it.” Steve took a *Sports Illustrated* out of his bag and slapped it on the table and began strumming through it angrily. “And people who say things like square are just trying to be different to be different.”

“Jesus,” Billy said, gaping at him. “Ya know, you’re full of surprises, Harrington?”

“Am I now.”

“Always have been,” he said under his breath.

Steve blushed. Both of his legs were jiggling. He sucked on his Pop.

“Well, you’re an asshole,” Steve said.

Billy looked legitimately offended by that. “No,” he said, “I’m not.”

“You say so.” He shrugged.

Billy sat back in his chair and crossed his arms. The little white stick of his sucker stuck between his puckered lips. Steve stared at a picture of a basketball player’s abdominal muscles and thought Billy’s were better.

The clocked ticked...and ticked...and-

“I’m actually a pretty decent person,” Billy said, sitting forward in his chair again. “Ask anybody. Except my old man. Ask Max!” He sounded more serious than casual, as if Steve was going to check his references, make some calls.

Steve sat frozen in his seat, at a loss, eyes roving around the room. “Um...alright.”

“I even took the kids out,” Billy said. “Max and her little nerd buddies? Took em’ to Chuck E. Cheese.”

Steve turned in his seat and looked at Billy as if looking at him could get him a handle on the conversation.

“They’re too old for Chuck E.-”

“Yeah yeah, they were too old for it, they were pissed. That’s not the point,” Billy said. “The *point* is, I’m a nice upstanding type citizen these days.”

“Oh. Okay...” Steve went back to his magazine and just as quickly turned back. “Didn’t you write ‘Coach Krug blows goats’ on the hood of his car?”

“ *Yeah* ,” Billy said. “But that guy’s a douchebag. He wears suits to

games like he's goddamn Pat Riley.”

“That’s true,” Steve said, because it really was. He frowned down at his magazine. None of the words seemed to make sense. He watched Billy lick and lick and wondered what that magic looking tongue would feel like. He frowned at a picture of Kareem Abdul-Jabar.

Kareem , he thought. Help me, man .

“I don’t think you have anyway,” Steve said quietly.

“Don’t think I’ve what?” Billy said, propping his head on his elbow.

“Sucked a dick.”

Billy burst out laughing at that. “I’ve sucked four of em’. No! Five.”

“If it was true, you wouldn’t just tell me”

“Oh my God .”

“You date girls,” Steve said, throwing up his hands.

“Not exclusively.”

“So what,” Steve said. “You just what, switch off?”

“I like guys better,” Billy said, a little longingly. “Hard to come by around here.”

“Oh.”

“Usually.”

“Oh.”

“You only like girls,” Billy said, something like an accusation.

Steve’s shoulder moved in what started as a shrug and turned into a vague flail. “Haaa...um... You know.” Steve cleared his throat. “People...” The magazine pictures seemed almost blurry all of a sudden. When he looked up Billy was smiling widely.

At her desk, Mrs. Schneider snored.

Steve cleared his throat and said, “Yeah, I like girls.”

“But...you don’t *only* like girls,” Billy said softly. His eyes were glittering as he sat there close to Steve.

“I...don’t...what... I’m...”

Billy cupped his hands around his mouth and said, “Harrington. I *like* you, braniac.”

Steve stared at him. “Oh.”

Billy nodded at the clock. “Hey, it’s four.” He got to his feet and the chair was too loud scraping the floor. He punched Steve’s shoulder. “Think about it. See ya around, Harrington.”

Before he could escape, Steve shouted after him. “What’d you do this time anyway?”

Billy grinned and spread his arms. “I didn’t have detention.” He spun around on his heel and whistled tunelessly on his way out the door.

Steve thought about the detention all weekend and felt that he had finally been launched into space and had left orbit and was now somewhere around Pluto.

On Monday before school even started, he found Billy in a shady deserted spot, smoking a Camel and looking moody. Steve strode up to him and wordlessly stole the cigarette from between his fingers, took a long drag, and then stubbed it out on the ground.

“You got a Tootsie Pop?” Steve said.

Billy took a Tootsie Pop out of his pocket and handed it to Steve, watching, finally the uncertain one. Steve took a few licks of the Tootsie Pop as they stared each other down.

“Hey Mr. Owl,” Steve said. He crowded Billy up against the wall and

wrapped his lips around his sucker and took it back out with a smack. “How many licks does it take to get to the Tootsie Roll center of a Tootsie Pop?”

“Um.” Billy swallowed. “I don’t...I dunno.”

“You’re supposed to say, that’s a good question,” Steve said softly and leaned in so that his lips were nearly brushing Billy’s. “Then you say one...” His tongue darted out and tasted Billy’s top lip. “Two...” He kissed Billy bottom lip and felt a hand on his hip. “Three.” He kissed Billy and tasted his tongue like fake cherries and cigarettes and heat and they didn’t hear the bell as they stood kissing out in space.